



2005 St. Louis Program Evaluation: An Executive Summary of Preliminary Results

MindOH! Discipline and Life Skills Series

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Executive Summary

MindOH! L.L.C. was created to research and develop innovative, measurable character education software systems that effectively increase high school completion rates and decrease suspensions, alternative school transfers and dropout rates in secondary schools, juvenile justice and youth organizations.

The Company offers direct support to students navigating their way through the disciplinary process with its *Discipline and Life Skills Series™ (DLSS)*. As part of MindOH!'s ongoing evaluation efforts, the company conducted a two-year research study (from April 2001 to May 2003) of the *MindOH! Discipline and Life Skill Series* in five Houston middle schools.

Results from the Houston study were encouraging as they suggested that the modules provide a mechanism for students to “calm down” emotionally, an important key to speaking rationally about an incident, listening, and thinking critically. The results also suggested that the modules encourage students to accept responsibility for their choices and actions and make amends for their infractions. Results from the Houston study suggested that the modules allow administrators to intervene more effectively with students who have committed disciplinary infractions. A complete evaluation report can be found at <http://www.mindoh.com/ResourcesResearchStudies.aspx>.

MindOH! partnered with two St. Louis schools, Lift for Life Academy and Francis Howell Union High School, to test the effectiveness of the *MindOH! Discipline and Life Skill Series*. The Lift for Life Academy is a charter middle school located in central St. Louis, and Francis Howell is an alternative high school located in St. Charles, Missouri.

Students were randomly assigned to either an intervention group or control group. Students in the intervention group who were referred to the administrative office for disciplinary problems completed the MindOH! *What's Up* module before meeting with a school official. These students also complete either the *Rule 1: Respect* or *Taking Charge: Responsibility* module. Students in the control group who were referred for discipline completed a short survey.

Data analysis and reporting were conducted by Beth Manke, Ph.D., Associate Professor in the Department of Human Development at the California State University, Long Beach. MindOH! also collaborated with Marvin W. Berkowitz, Ph.D., Sanford N. McDonnell Professor of Character Education at the University of Missouri - St. Louis.

Preliminary Results

Study Participants

In total, 108 control group surveys were completed. Of these 108 surveys, 57 were completed by “unique first-time users” (28 students who completed control surveys only once plus 29 who completed control surveys multiple times).

In total, there were 172 hits to the *What's Up* module. Of these 172 hits, 65 were completed by “unique first-time users” (27 students who used the *What's Up?* module only once plus 38 who used it multiple times).

The above numbers indicate that over 50% of students who committed a disciplinary infraction went on to commit another infraction. This is true for both students in the control and intervention groups (students who used the MindOH! modules).



31% of control group students experienced some form of decrease in emotional distress.

50% of module users experienced a decrease in emotional distress.

The following preliminary analyses are based on the 57 control group and 65 module first-time hits or unique users. It is important to focus on first time hits or unique users so that students who use the modules more than once do not unduly influence the findings (this is an issue of independence of data).

Infractions

In this report, infractions that deal with disrespectful behavior are referred to as “respect infractions” and infractions that deal with irresponsible behavior are referred to as “responsibility infractions.” Students in both the control and intervention (module user) groups were more likely to be referred to the office for respect infractions rather than responsibility infractions. Specifically, 81% of the infractions committed by students in the control group were respect violations, whereas 77% of the infractions committed by students in the intervention group (module users) were respect violations.

These findings are in line with the results from the Houston study where 70% of all infractions were respect violations with disruptive behavior representing the number one violation. Although there were no statistically significant gender differences in infractions, there was a tendency for males to commit more of the aggressive infractions (e.g., fighting, pushing and shoving, cursing, etc.).

Declines in emotional distress

It is believed that the MindOH! modules provide a mechanism for students to “calm down” emotionally. This is important as emotional control is the key to speaking rationally about an incident, listening, and thinking critically. To test this assertion, students in the control group rated their feelings of emotional distress upon entering the administrator’s office and again right

before meeting with a school professional. Ratings were made on a 7-point scale (i.e., 1 = not at all upset, 2 = uncomfortable, 3 = a little upset, 4 = upset, 5 = pretty upset, 6 = very upset, or 7 = off the meter).

Students who completed the *What’s Up?* module rated their feelings of emotional distress on the same scale at the beginning of the module and again at the end. Evidence for the effectiveness of the *What’s Up?* module was found when the ratings of emotional distress for the students in the control group were compared to module users’ ratings of emotional distress. Specifically, we found that a greater percentage of students who used the *What’s Up?* module, as compared to the control group, experienced a decrease in emotional distress.

- 31% of control group students experienced some form of decrease in emotional distress.
- 50% of module users experienced a decrease in emotional distress.

Results reveal that although control group students experienced decreases in emotional distress over time, module users, on average, experienced greater declines. Module users reported significantly less emotional distress at the end of the module as compared to final ratings of distress made by students in the control group who merely waited in the office to meet with an administrator. These results provide the clearest evidence that the *What’s Up?* module serves as an effective tool for cooling down.

Additional analyses revealed gender differences for declines in emotional distress for module users. The modules are particularly effective for reducing emotional distress among male students. Male students report greater distress at the beginning of the module and experience greater declines in emotional distress over the course of using the module.



96% of students reported that the program (module) was easy to understand. The other 4% of students reported that the program may have been easy to understand. No student reported that the program was hard to understand.

Willingness to take responsibility for infractions

It is thought that the MindOH! modules prompt students to think more critically about what they have done and to take greater responsibility for their actions. To test this assertion, students were asked, upon referral to the office whether or not they were at fault for what happened (no, maybe, yes).

Comparisons of responses from control group students and module users revealed that 10% of control group students took more responsibility for their infractions after merely waiting to see an administrator, whereas 18% of modules took more responsibility for their infractions after using the *What's Up* module.

Willingness to take action to make things right again

Students were asked what actions they would be willing to take to make things right again. Students were asked to endorse one or more options or to list ideas of their own. Following are the number and percent of students who indicated that they would be willing to take various actions to make things right again

Seventy-one percent of module users were willing to do what they were supposed to do, in contrast to 60% of control group students who were willing to do what they were supposed to do to make things right again.

Students who completed the *What's Up ?* module also completed either the *Rule 1: Respect* or *Taking Charge: Responsibility* module.

The *Rule 1: Respect* module was used 138 times. Examination of students' responses revealed:

- 93% of students reported that they were willing to look at things from another point of view.
- 93% of students reported that as a result of using the module, they have a better understanding of the different types of respect.
- 95% of students reported that they were willing take responsibility for the choices they made that got them there.
- 86% of students reported that they learned to make better choices, whereas another 11% stated that they may have learned to make better choices. Only 2% of students thought they did not learn to make better choices.
- 79% of students reported that the program (module) was easy to understand. Another 15% of students reported that the program may have been easy to understand. Only 6% of students reported that the program was not easy to understand.
- 74% of students reported that the program (module) was helpful. An additional 16% of students reported that the program may have been helpful. Only 10% of students felt the program was not helpful.
- 86% of students reported that they were more successful in telling their side of the story.

The *Taking Charge: Responsibility* module was used 26 times. Examination of students' responses revealed:

- 96% of students reported that they were willing to work to get a positive result.
- 100% of students reported that they have a better understanding of why being responsible gets them better results.
- 92% of students reported that they were willing to take more



“The one thing I’ve done on repeat offenders is bring them into the office and shown them the portion of the admin database that indicates they are Number 1, the student who has been in discipline more than anyone else. And I have seen them actively seek to change that.”

responsibility for the choices that got them there.

- 81% of students reported that they had learned more about how to make better choices.
- 96% of students reported that the program (module) was easy to understand. The other 4% of students reported that the program may have been easy to understand. No student reported that the program was hard to understand.
- 70% of students reported that the program (module) was helpful. The other 30% of students reported that the program may have been helpful. No student reported that the program was not helpful.
- 92% of students reported that they were more successful in telling their side of the story.

Feedback from the School Principals

Mike Hysten is the principal for Francis Howell Union High School and Chris Layman is the dean of students for the Lift for Life Academy. MindOH! conducted interviews with Mr. Hysten and Mr. Layman to gather qualitative feedback to support the data and findings in this preliminary study. The following are direct quotations.

Chris Layman

“Without a doubt, this saves me time. With MindOH!, by the time the students reach me, I already have their story in front of me and they’re ready to sit and talk.”

“We had one young lady who when put into in-school suspension would inevitably be suspended because she could not sit and do what was asked of her. But when she did MindOH!, she was engaged and de-escalated to the point that we were able to send her back to class. We just graduated her, and she was one that we had serious concerns as to whether or not she would make it through the school year.”

“It allows students to reflect a little more and helps them admit their responsibility. When they make amends, they have a better understanding of why they are making amends.”

Mike Hysten

“It’s helped us reduce suspensions.”

“We actually finished the year fight free. If you’ve ever actually been in an alternative schools, that’s next to a miracle. Although we had heated arguments . . . we would put the students on MindOH! to work through it. They would explain what they had been doing and why they wanted to punch someone in the face. They would talk about it on MindOH! and in turn the fight actually never happened.”

“We are discovering that MindOH! is giving kids a chance to finally tell us what’s really bothering them. The program has impacted our ability to reach those outside issues that kids bring to school and offer support to their families.”